

ADVENTURES IN BEE-KEEPING

I HAVE NEW TENANTS - ABOUT 10,000 OF THEM, WRITES TED BROWN



TED BROWN
Column

It seems that I'm starting down another road of adventure.

It involves adding new faces to the far- tiny faces that will make their presence known.

You see, I'm becoming an 'honorary apiarist.' In lay-terms, a bee-keeper.

Now first things first, the word honorary is key to the story here. You see, my friend set up a bee hive on my farm. And he is the apiarist, not me. I'm one of those "stand at a healthy distance from the hive while someone else does it" type of apiarist.

I ain't dumb - those little critters can sting.

This adventure started a couple months ago, when my friend Bob asked if he could set up a hive on the farm. Lately, the agricultural news has been filled with stories of the bee population dying out, due to various causes. And if the bees die off, how do our plants pollinate?

So I was actually quite flattered with Bob's request.

Bob assured me that I wouldn't be doing any hands-on apiarist duties,

so I readily agreed.

Last week he set up the hive, (one of those familiar white wooden boxes we see in out the meadows) in preparation for a new bee family (called a 'nuc'), moving in within a week or two.

Nucs, (or nucleus colonies) are small honey bee colonies created from larger colonies. The name is derived from the fact that a nuc hive is centered around a queen, who is the nucleus of that particular bee colony.

The nuc consists of wooden frames with bees, brood (baby bees), and both open and sealed honey and pollen storage cells, as well as a laying queen of the current year. The purpose of the nuc is to provide everything the newly-transported bees need to get themselves established in the new hive.

When the nuc is brought in, it contains thousands of bees - some sources estimate about 3,500 bees to a pound, or about 10,000 bees in a typical three-pound nuc.

After a week or so, the virgin queen takes her mating flight, and is fertilized during that flight, mating in the air with as many drones as possible. She is fertilized multiple times during the course of a couple days of her mating flight, but she only mates for that one period in her life.

After that, the queen spends all her time laying eggs to build the hive.

They reproduce at a staggering rate, and by mid-summer, Bob said that hive will likely be home to

about 30,000 bees.

I must admit, I found it fascinating how complex and efficient a bee hive could be. But of course, all is not always perfect in every hive. Honey bees have some parasites that wreak havoc on the hive. There are mites that attach themselves to the back of the honey bee, piercing their exoskeleton, then drain their body fluids.

And certain varieties of moths enter the hive and fill it with "silk," overtaking the entire hive. The only way to deal with the moth parasite is to burn the entire hive.

For years, I've sat on the veranda, idly watching the occasional bee land on a flower to harvest the pollen. I've often wondered to myself, "How far did that bee fly to locate that flower?"

Bob says they can fly up to two miles to locate pollen. Imagine, that tiny insect flew two miles to get here? Wow!

This summer, I'm hopeful I'll have a different viewpoint.

When one of our bees lands on our flowers, I can say "Good work little worker bee."

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